

2024 -- H 7251

LC004056

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR COMPENSATION
STABILIZATION ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Donovan, Fogarty, Speakman, Spears, Caldwell, Handy,
Diaz, McNamara, Potter, and Cotter

Date Introduced: January 19, 2024

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 114

4 RHODE ISLAND EARLY EDUCATOR COMPENSATION STABILIZATION ACT

5 **16-114-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode Island Early Educator
7 Compensation Stabilization Act."

8 **16-114-2. Legislative findings and purpose.**

9 The general assembly hereby finds that:

10 (1) Young children's healthy brain development and learning depends on consistent,
11 nurturing care and enriching learning opportunities at home and in early care and education settings.
12 Starting at birth, day-to-day interactions with family members and early educators shape children's
13 brain architecture upon which all future learning and development is built.

14 (2) Many of the early educators in Rhode Island earn very low wages even when they
15 achieve credentials equivalent to kindergarten teachers and demonstrate effective practices.
16 Licensed child care and early learning programs across the state report difficulty attracting,
17 developing, and retaining effective early childhood professionals.

18 (3) A 2019 statewide survey of early childhood professionals in Rhode Island found that

1 over forty percent (40%) of infant/toddler educators worried about having enough food to feed their
2 family and fifty percent (50%) worried about having enough money to pay for housing.

3 (4) The 2019 statewide survey also found that almost one-third (1/3) of early educators had
4 a second job to help make ends meet and almost two-thirds (2/3) reported that they plan to leave
5 their early education job if the compensation does not improve. And yet, most report that they enjoy
6 working with children and families and many have earned college credits and degrees in child
7 development and early education.

8 (5) A landmark report issued by the National Academy of Science in 2015 found that
9 educators of young children, including infants and toddlers, need the same high level of knowledge
10 and competencies as teachers of older children and that educational qualifications and
11 compensation of early educators should be equivalent to those of kindergarten through grade twelve
12 (K-12) teachers.

13 (6) According to 2022 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for
14 a child care teacher in Rhode Island was thirteen dollars and ninety-seven cents (\$13.97) per hour,
15 in the same range or below the hourly wages of fast food workers, dishwashers, laundry workers,
16 animal caretakers and retail sales workers.

17 (7) By enacting this chapter, the general assembly acknowledges the need to sustain and
18 strengthen strategies to help licensed child care and early learning programs attract, develop, and
19 retain effective educators to care for and educate children.

20 **16-114-3. Stabilizing and strengthening the early educator workforce.**

21 The departments of human services and education, shall work in collaboration to:

22 (1) Allocate sufficient funds to continue the Rhode Island T.E.A.C.H. early childhood
23 program, the statewide, comprehensive, research-based workforce development scholarship
24 program established under § 16-87-4 to support attainment of the national Child Development
25 Associate credential and completion of college coursework and degrees in early childhood
26 education and child or youth development.

27 (2) Allocate sufficient funds to continue and strengthen registered apprenticeships for early
28 educators that support attainment of national credentials, college coursework and degrees while
29 providing opportunities to develop high-quality practices through regular on-the-job coaching by
30 master early educators.

31 (3) Allocate sufficient funds of at least two million five hundred thousand dollars
32 (\$2,500,000) to continue the Child Care WAGES program, providing education-based salary
33 supplements to center-based educators, directors, and family childcare providers working with
34 children in licensed early childhood programs to increase retention of qualified and educated

1 teachers and providers.

2 (4) Allocate sufficient funds in FY 2025 to continue providing a seven hundred fifty dollar
3 (\$750) retention bonus every three (3) months to those individuals working in licensed child care
4 and early learning programs who:

5 (i) Have received a pandemic retention bonus in three (3) of the previous four (4) quarters
6 and have been with the same employer for at least twelve (12) months.

7 (ii) Work directly and consistently with children for at least ten (10) hours per week.

8 (iii) Earn less than or equal to twenty-three dollars (\$23.00) per hour as a base wage.

9 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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1 This act would direct the department of human services and the department of education
2 to work collaboratively to sustain and strengthen existing workforce development and
3 compensation programs for educators working in licensed child care and early learning programs
4 statewide.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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